THE UNIFICATION OF UTIK - THE ULTIMATE BUFFER ZONE

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"A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity;
an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty."
Sir Winston S. Churchill

The daily ritual of the Azerbaijani border clashes, the skirmishes, the sneak attacks, landmine explosions, the sniper shooting**s** are slowly taking a toll on the young men and women of Armenia and Artsakh. More often than not, the inhabitants of the border villages and towns have become the innocent victims of Azerbaijani army's target**-**shooting practices.

In Persian, "Azerbaijan" aptly means the "Land of Fire," provided we also add "--and Ferocity", for being untamed and wild. We ought to find a way to stop the carnage, the brutal killing of both military personnel as well as non-combatant civilians.

Since the 1994 armistice, Azerbaijan has consistently violated the ceasefire agreement as a means of sending a warning to the Armenians and the international community that Azerbaijani government is not happy with the status quo for Artsakh to be free and independent. Moreover, President Ilham Aliyev tries to distract his government's shortcomings --such as an ailing economy, kleptocracy, political dysfunction or rock-bottom ratings on human rights. He attempts to cover up his failings by engaging in bellicose expressions against Armenians to rally his people around his cause of regaining Nagorno Karabakh (Artsakh) and to capture the entire Republic of Armenia as Azerbaijan's ancestral lands.

In addition to his anti-Armenian rhetoric, President Aliyev is working hard to use a lion's share of his country's oil revenues to increase Azerbaijan's military spending after having enriched himself, his family, and friends. Aliyev has already established a kleptocratic reputation around the world.

In recent weeks, Armenia and Artsakh have experienced enhanced violence from Azerbaijan, costing the lives of many soldiers on both sides. Reportedly, the intensity of the fighting has been the worst since the 1994 ceasefire. As of April 29, 2020, Azerbaijan forces had begun to launch 60-millimeter mortars on Artsakh positions on the eastern front of the Martuni district.

Arguably, there is an urgent need to do something about this costly standoff. Armenia and Artsakh are being victimized unnecessarily. It is high time we propose ways to overcome this debilitating madness. In this article, I would like to propose a way to put Azerbaijan in a precarious position so that they would stop attacking the border inhabitants of Artsakh.

To protect the lives of the non-combatant, innocent border village inhabitants, a larger buffer zone based on a vital region is imperative. Naturally, the ideal buffer zone would be away from Armenian and Artsakh border villages.

A buffer zone is a neutral zone or area between two potentially hostile nations, designed to

discourage, if not prevent, overt acts of aggression. Buffer zones are as old as humanity. Since the beginning of human origins, rivers, mountains, canyons and other land formations have been used as territorial demarcations and buffer zones between ~~two~~ rival tribes.

Essentially, any area serving to mitigate or neutralize potential conflict would save lives of our men, women, and children living in border villages and towns with hostile Azerbaijan bent on breaking the armistice agreement with Armenia with impunity. A buffer zone also provides the crucial alarm function to alert the people that the enemy is approaching.

Five years in the US Air Force has taught me a thing or two. We need to create a buffer zone from Azerbaijan's soft underbelly. Next time, Azerbaijan attacks Armenia and Artsakh, we should take the opportunity to capture Ganja-Gazakh plain located on the western part of Azerbaijan all the way to the Russian Federation border through Shaki-Zaqatala district from Martakert in self-defense (or taking off from Agdam road through Ganja-Gazakh plain to the town of Shaki next to the Russian Federation).

Many Lezgins live in the Shaki-Zaqatala district. Their sympathies appear to lie with the Armenians. During the 1994 war of Karabakh liberation, Lezgins adamantly refused to fight against the Armenians. If we do not do it now, this rare chance will be lost since Azerbaijan is becoming the invincible "Israel" of the Caucasus. They have the petrodollars to acquire mercenaries and sophisticated weapons.

Establishing this safety corridor actually lies mainly in historic Armenian lands, namely Utik, the 12th province of Greater Armenia. As you may know, Utik was a province of the Kingdom of Armenia. It is also a region of Caucasian Albania after the splitting of Armenia in 387 A.D. by the Sassanid Persia. Currently, most of the region is within the rich farming district of present-day Azerbaijan. This beautiful region of lowland prairie is situated west of the Kura River and part of it lies within the Tavush province (marz) of northeastern Armenia.



Map of Greater Armenia provinces showing Utik in the northeast when Azaris were still herding sheep as nomads of Central Asia, when Azerbaijan did not yet exist as a nation west of the Caspian Sea, let alone as a state.

We would be killing two birds with one stone. Utik is an Armenian province--part of it (Tavush) is already part of Armenia. The rest should be annexed to it. Incidentally, part of Shahumyan district in present-day Azerbaijan belongs to Armenia, too. Before the Artsakh liberation war, there were over 27 Armenian villages there. Unfortunately, it is still under the Azerbaijani control. This once-vibrant Armenian district happens to lie in the path of the ultimate buffer zone that is being proposed in this article.

Since we have almost daily casualties with Azerbaijan, we must have a buffer zone to keep the enemy at bay. Now, if you are convinced that it would be a good idea to have Utik as a buffer zone, read the rest of this article which covers the steps of a strategy for the realisation of this idea before it is too late.

To accomplish this daredevil idea of creating a buffer zone, we have to adhere to the following master plan which contains the major steps of the strategy

I. Green lighting the Mission. First of all, we need to have the mission of creating a larger buffer zone around Armenia and Artsakh green lit by the Russians. Our politicians and especially our generals should stop shadow boxing and begin negotiating seriously with President Vladimir Putin to reciprocate the Armenian loyalty to Russia in so many ways during so ~~many~~ recent centuries.

When it comes to Russian interest, creating all sorts of safety and buffer zones around the Black Sea is permissible, but when it comes to Armenia, a buffer zone is not right. This is an unfortunate fact although of all the countries in the Russian sphere of influence, Armenia has the distinction to have been the most loyal.

Since 19th century, almost every war waged by Russia, Armenian soldiers were there to assist and to lead. According to one of Jirair Tutunjian's informative and interesting articles, Armenia and Artsakh have given Russia about 1,000 generals and admirals who have brought glory to Russia on the battlefield.

Putin is not highly-educated. He does not even know the long history of the friendship between Armenia and Russia, dating back to the middle ages. Our politicians should fill his ears of Armenia's and Artsakh's contributions to Russia.

Russia is the major trading partner of Armenia. Both belong to the same economic association. If Armenia is a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), how could Russia sell weapons to Armenia's sworn enemy? Where is the group's spirit of solidarity? Where is the allegiance to protect one another? It is high time Russia returned the favor for all the sacrifices Armenia has made for Russia in the name of friendship.

Putin should be put on notice that should Baku attack, Armenia will capture Utik. If it's O.K for Russia to capture South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Crimea then it should be O.K for Armenia to capture Utik. Surely, Putin does not want instability in the Caucasus. Double standard, you say? I agree with you.

Arrangements should be made with President Putin to green-light the Armenian move to liberate Utik all the way to the Russian Federation's border.

II. Politics with Russia. Politics is not a science; it is an art. We need to work on Russian officials until they are persuaded and ashamed not to reciprocate Armenians' allegiance to Russia. The contributions of Armenia to Russia are innumerable. A strong Armenia is good for Russia. Armenia has accepted to join forces with Russia almost ~~in~~ at every treaty.

As mentioned earlier, Armenia is a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Armenia has supported Russia's objective of strengthening the CIS. As a result, Armenia and Russia became members of a military alliance in 1994, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), along with four ex-Soviet countries. It's a relationship Armenia values for its security.

For economic development and solidarity, Armenia became a full member of the Eurasian

Economic Union in 2015 by giving up its opportunity to become an associate member of the European Union. Obviously, Armenia has put all of its eggs in Russia's basket of friendship, collaboration, mutual aid, and military alliance. Time and time again, Armenia has stood by Russia with utmost loyalty. It is imperative to make Russia realize that in return for the loyalty Armenia has shown to Russia, we expect Moscow's support when we unify Utik to Armenia in response to yet another Azerbaijan attack.

III. Waiting for a *Casus Belli*. We need to wait for another sneak attack by Azerbaijan, similar to the April 2-5, 2016 episode. *Casus Belli* would allow Armenians act in retaliation as self defense.

History will repeat itself. Azerbaijan will repeat the so-called Four-day War with Armenia when trouble brews in Baku, when people become dissatisfied with their economic conditions or the present dictatorial regime of Aliyev. To be done only when Baku surprises Armenia with another murderous attack. It is a matter of time.

IV. **Occupation Tactics.** Either carry out the mission of establishing a buffer zone at once as a whole or ~~by~~ piece meal as a series of retaliations to Azerbaijan's aggression. However, the piece meal approach, in several phases, has major problems on third-party intervention after the first retaliation. Armenia might be forced to sign a treaty not to proceed with capturing any more territories of Azerbaijan even in self-defense.

Capturing Utik at once and creating a buffer zone all the way to the Russian Federation would be the better approach. Like dropping a boulder into the backyard of Azerbaijan, Armenia should accomplish the mission at once. A good recent example is Turkey's invasion of Cyprus and laying anchor in the northern part of the island. No matter how many world organizations have demanded the withdrawal of Turkey from the island, Turkey has disregarded them. In fact, Turkey has built a wall to separate the two sections of Cyprus, indicating that the Turks are there to stay. In sum, it would be advantageous for Armenia to strike once as retaliation and regain Utik all the way to the Russian Federation's border.

V. Defense-in-Depth Principle. This is a preferred military strategy which seeks to delay the advance of an attack, rather than defeat it with one strong line of defense. The rationale behind the Defense-in-Depth principle is the thinking that it is more difficult for an enemy to defeat a complex and multi-layered defense system than to penetrate a single barrier like the line of contact between two enemies. Additionally, the Defense-in-Depth would enhance security and provide the crucial time to prepare a counter attack. Defense-in-Depth Principle should be used when the Armenians retaliate against Azerbaijan's armed forces and move forward and northward to establish the planned buffer zone while another line of defense if left behind, ready to do battle should the retaliation plans encounter difficulties in carrying out the mission.

VI. *Uti Possidetis* Principle. Originating in Roman Law, this principle in international law states that territory and other property remains with its possessor at the end of a conflict, unless otherwise a

treaty is signed to disallow *uti possidetis* from the possession of property and territory taken during the war, then the principle of *uti possidetis* will prevail. In other words, at the end of the war with Azerbaijan, if Armenia acquired Utik province by war, it can keep it. This principle is derived from the Latin expression *uti possidetis, ita possideatis*, meaning "may you continue to possess such as you do possess". This principle is akin to the idea of "prize of war" which means military property seized by the victorious party after a war or battle, typically at sea, can be kept.

In sum, how long do we endure the slow attrition of our young men at the so-called line of contact? When will our border villagers go to bed with ~~a~~ peace of mind and enjoy their sleep without any fear of injury? Let us use the elasticity of mind to imagine living in one of those villages not knowing when the mortar attack will begin at the crack of dawn. How comfortably anyone can sleep under these circumstances. How can we let our children have fun on the school playground when they have been the unfortunate victims of Azerbaijan's target shooting practices? We have to soldier on to find a solution to this daily loss of our precious assets, soldiers as well as civilians.

Aristotle said it right: "You will never do anything in this world without courage. It is the greatest quality of the mind next to honor". We need to muster courage to bite the bullet and try to disorient Azerbaijan. Ganja-Gazakh region is the heart of Azerbaijan's gas and oil as pipelines pass through it, destined ~~to~~ for Europe. It would be like capturing the soft belly of Azerbaijan's economy if Armenia were to create a buffer zone out of this strategic area.

As you well know, Armenia is an island on land. There is no way to find an outlet to the Black Sea. Armenia has the chance to become a land peninsula if it annexes Armenia's province of Utik. Armenia is suffocating. It needs to breathe oxygen by connecting to Russia, at least by land.

Russia, Israel, and Turkey, to cite a few, are rushing to build buffer zones: a buffer zone would deter war. "Only Buffer Zones Can Protect Israel" claims an editorial published recently in the *New York Times*. Israel has three major buffer zones: two on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to keep the Palestinians at bay and the third on the Syrian side on the Golan Heights. Recently, Turkey established two new buffer zones along the northern border of Syria and Russia recently built several buffer zones all over northern Black Sea.

Why does the West need Armenia? If Armenia is taken over, the continuation of the sword of Islam would be at the door of Europe. It is the moral obligation of Europe to keep the first nation that accepted Christianity as state religion and, in the process, has paid dearly over the centuries. Islam enjoys brotherhood, while Christianity adheres to selfhood.

Our generals are shadow boxing. Had our generals eyes at the back of their heads we would not have lost three villages and a strategic stretch of land to Azerbaijan when a surprise attack was made against Armenians during the so-called Four-Day War. We needed our past generals spend more time on the drawing board for designing strategies than throwing the dice at casinos. After the Velvet Revolution, we have dedicated generals to lead us out of this precarious position of being a

shooting target of Azerbaijan's armed forces.

Baku's rampant disinformation and social media's tsunami of fake news “inform” the world community of Armenian aggression against Azerbaijan. Western countries would understand that due to intractability of Azerbaijan, it forced Armenia to create a safe zone to give peace of mind to the border villagers. Such a window of opportunity won't be there in less than a decade for Azerbaijan is being trained and armed by Israeli military experts at the behest of the so-called Mountain Jews of Azerbaijan who are mostly ethnically Persian Azari Turks converted to Judaism, and who are assumed to be one of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel.

Creating a safe zone, Armenia faces an epic, life-changing choice. This will be the ultimate buffer zone for it will regain the historic Armenian province of Utik which will include the Shahumian district, and a direct access to the Russian Federation. It is worth noting that since Utik is an Armenian province, capturing it won't be considered as conquest, but the liberation of Armenian lands for the necessity of self-protection from Azerbaijan's incessant attacks on the peaceful Armenian people. In the end, when all is said and done, we won't regret for letting the golden opportunity pass us by for a wide and deep buffer zone would create an elusive target for the enemy.

There are no comments yet.